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# Technology Is No Substitute For Organization

by BARBARA HEMPHILL

Technology is changing the business environment for everyone — from small home-based businesses to multi-national corporations. These changes are here to stay, or more accurately, to continue changing. Not only can you survive these changes, but you can also turn them into exciting opportunities by applying some basic organizing principles.

Not many years ago, getting organized was an option. Some of us were lucky enough to have our own assistant to organize for us. Today technology has made organizing a necessity for three reasons:

- We have more to organize than ever before.
- As a result of the economy, and fueled by the capabilities of technology, companies are downsizing. All managers used to have an assistant, but after downsizing most of those assistants are gone, and now we are faced with organizing ourselves.
- There is a greater sense of urgency than ever before. Whether by e-mail, cell phone, fax or pager, questions and answers demand immediate attention.

You may be reluctant to get organized, as many people are. But often it is because they have been misled about what it means to be organized. My definition of

organization is very simple: “Does it work, and do you like it?” And if what you are organizing — or not organizing— affects others, there is a third question: “Does it work for others?”

If your answer to any of the questions above is “No,” try the following suggestions to help you get started on the road to organization and make the most of your technology.

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## Learn to Choose Technology Effectively

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Most of us are trying to do more with less, and working harder is

not always the answer. The real question is “Does anyone really need to do this?” Just because technology allows you to accomplish a specific task doesn’t mean it’s the best way for you to use your resources. Sometimes adding a new software program creates more work than not having it. Think ahead and make sure that the results of this new technology will be worth it, both financially and in terms of human resources.

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## Continually Practice the Art of Wastebasketry

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Research shows we use only 20

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percent of what we keep. For each piece of information you receive, whether in hard copy or on the computer screen, ask these questions: Does this require action? Can I identify a specific use? Would it be difficult to get again? Is it recent enough to be useful? If the answer to all those questions is "No," ask one final question: "What's the worst thing that could happen if I don't have this piece of paper?" If you can live with your answer — toss or recycle it. Even within your office, do you see unused equipment, books you'll never use again or outdated inventory? Just get rid of it and you'll experience a new sense of energy.

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### Implement a System for Keeping Track of Names and Telephone Numbers

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Most of my clients agree that their best source of business is networking, but piles of unidentified business cards will not do the trick. Deciding which system to use is far less important than using it consistently. For some people, technology is the perfect answer, while others accomplish their needs with a simple Rolodex. A combination of choices, such as a computer program, Rolodex, address book and palm pilot, can be the right answer. Whatever you decide, stick to it and be consistent!

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### Create a Paper Filing System That Works — Easily and Consistently!

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In spite of the computer-age promises of a paperless office, most of us are faced with more paper than ever before. If you find

that your filing system is not working and most of it you never use, clean out your most accessible file drawer and start over. Begin filing new information by asking "If I need this information again, what word will I think of first?" The answer is your new file title. Alphabetize the file titles, and keep a list of them — a file index. Before you make a new file, check the existing list to avoid creating a file for "Car" when you already have "Auto." Keep a copy near the filing cabinets and at the desk of everyone who uses the files.

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### Create a Computer Filing System That Works — Easily and Consistently!

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Remember that a computer's value is that it allows you to use a file again. If you do not intend to use the document again, there is no value in storing it in a computer.

The key to effectively organizing your computer is your directory, and the first step is to point all files into one directory, regardless of what program created those files. This will make it easier to retrieve what you need, regardless of what program created it, and make it easier to back it up for archives or for transfer to other locations.

In paper systems, people frequently get into trouble because they have too many categories, while in computer systems, they get into trouble because they have too few categories (i.e., directories and subdirectories). To make things easier, your computer gives you a "Find" feature that will help you locate any file you want by searching for key words without having to actually open each file.

Two of my favorite directories are:

- Pending. This is for files on which I am currently working. I can quickly see which documents are in process, or if necessary it will be easy for someone else to retrieve my work.

- Outbox. Here I file work that I have completed, but need to print, fax, give to someone else, or send to another location.

Remember that in any organizing process, you may feel worse before you feel better. To change is difficult — even when you want to. It takes time to learn new behavior patterns. Organization is like any other skill. If you want to play tennis, you can read books, look at videos, get the best coach, and go to the best court, but after a week you still won't be a great tennis player. It takes practice. So does organizing. □



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